DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 330 107 EA 022 846

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TITLE Conflict and Social Determinism: The Reprivatization of Education.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Compulsory Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Home Schooling; Ideology; Institutional Role; Political Socialization; Power Structure; *Private Education; *Privatization; Public Schools; *States Powers
IDENTIFIERS *Conflict Theory

ABSTRACT

Issues surrounding parental decisions to privatize their children's education are examined in this paper, which focuses on three issues: (1) the declining credibility of state-sponsored education; (2) the nature and causes of privatized education as a viable alternative; and (3) the context in which this option occurs. The first section discusses several Marxist theories of the state, and the second section uses data on parents who home school to demonstrate the relationship between privatized education and the structural conflicts rooted in the state's attempt to balance its dual imperatives of accumulation and legitimation. Methodology involved a questionnaire sent to 1,600 Oregon families, of whom 35 percent responded; indepth interviews were held with 15 of those families. Rationales given for home schooling included lack of parental influence on the educational system and opposition to its ideological content. Other findings showed that home schooling parents had little confidence in public education and other institutions, especially organized religion. Two groups, Christians and New Age affiliates, shared ideological reasons for home schooling. A conclusion is that the current trend toward privatized education must be examined within the wider context of "state crises" manifested at the organizational and ideological levels of the state, and that the home schooling movement is linked to the state's struggle to balance contradictory imperatives. Three tables are included. (33 references) (LMI)

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CONFLICT AND SOCIAL DETERMINISM: THE REPRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION

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Presented at the 1991 Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association, Chicago, Ill.

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CONFLICT AND SOCIAL DETERMINISM: THE REPRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION

Introduction

The common and widely reiterated observation of a declining confidence in American public education is substantiated by the mounting criticisms of the established form and content of publicly-funded educational systems. Within schools, demands are now being made for more compensatory programs, specialized curriculums, renewed disciplinary policies, increased academic standards, and new teacher evaluation programs. New proposals for educational financing through tuition tax credits and educational vouchers have become currently debated topics. Moreover, alternative and private schools are increasingly emerging as viable substitutes to state-sponsored education. Even the option of 'deschooling' society and privatizing education has become an attractive idea to many in academic and educational circles (Illich, 1972; James and Levin, 1983; Whitty, 1984).

Public educators must now attempt to accommodate various interest-group demands by providing an array of educational programs and strategies. Faced with a tightening fiscal policy, the educational reform scene that began over a decade ago, is today a "kaleidoscopic confusion of contending interests, of different assessments of need, of rhetorical panaceas and jarring hoplessness" (Tyack, 1974:289).

These criticisms shape not only the current discourse over the direction of public education, but also indicate that established forms of schooling have become the terrain upon which contending forces express their social and political interests (Tyack and Hansot, 1982; Boyd, 1983; Lipset and Schneider, 1983; Shapiro, 1983; Livingstone,

1983,1985). Given this atmosphere of intensifying special-interest group activity and the crucial role of schooling in the socialization of the next generation, it is understandable that alternatives to public schooling have become a focal point of public debate.

This paper is an attempt to better understand the issues surrounding the public's disillusionment with the quality and content of state-sponsored education and the decision many parents are making to resist compulsory education laws by withdrawing children from public schools altogether. Popular conceptions of the increasing privatization of education typically blame parental neglect, student behavior, teacher permissiveness, and bureaucratic administration for the troubled nature of public education. Private forms of education, many believe, represent a rational response to what is perceived as an erosion of educational standards and values (Holt,1983; Divoky,1983; Lines,1986). It is my contention that to attribute parental decisions to privatize their children's education to these factors alone offers a much too narrow conceptualization. To adequately account for this trend, I believe, we must explore more thoroughly the declining credibility and legitimacy of state-sponsored education, the nature and causes of privatized education as a viable alternative, and the context within which this option continues to proliferate.

Current research regarding the intensified conflict over public education, and its consequences--the growth of private educational forms--has suffered from a lack of theoretical discussion. The first section of this paper will discuss several Marxist theories of the state to broaden our understanding of the contemporary conflicts surrounding state institutions in general, and public education

specifically. The second part of the paper will use data on parents who teach their children at home to demonstrate how privatized schooling is related to structural conflicts rooted in the state's attempt to balance its dual imperatives. Such analysis will allow us to transcend the typically banal interpretations of public disillusionment with state-schooling and provide insight into the wider context within which the decision to privitize education is now taking place.

Education and Theories of the State

I believe that the proliferation of home education and other privatized educational forms can best be understood as part of a wider social conflict that arises as various groups struggle, on the terrain of the state and its institutions, to fulfill their private interests. Several theories regarding the role the state plays in capitalist society illuminate the context within which these conflicts emerge (see Carnoy, 1984).

The more traditional Marxist viewpoint argues that the state, as part of the superstructure, is an epiphenomenon of capitalist economic relations and that state activities, such as education, flow from, and are dependent upon, the requirements of capitalist production (Holloway and Picciotto, 1978; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). State apparatuses, like the education system, are generally assumed to organize themselves in a manner that is functional for capital. The content of schooling, therefore, will simply "correspond" to or mirror the economic base by disseminatng dominate class ideologies and sets of knowledge the reproduce dominate class interests.

In contrast, more recent theories suggest that the state is a 'relatively autonomous' institution which embodies the contradictory demands of various social classes. As such, the state and its appartatuses cannot be reduced to a mere reflection of production processes, but must be seen as 'sites of struggle' which respond to and represent a complex and heterogeneous configuration of elements. By positing the state as a 'relatively autonomous' institution which mediates conflicting demands, the hegemonic, ideological, and legitmation functions of state apparatusus become centrally important (Gramsci, 1971; Poulantzas, 1979). Viewing state activities from this vantage point contributes significantly to our understanding of educational development, conflict, and change.

Particularly useful is the contribution of Nicos Poulantzas (1979). Although Poulantzas's primary focus is much wider, education does constitute a concern found in his later work which is important to any conceptualization proposing education as a 'site of struggle.' Poulantzas argues that while the primary goal of the state (and education) is to form a consensus reflecting the interests of capital as a whole, his work also underscores the importance of recognizing that state power is not totally uniform or coherent, but often marked by contradiction, dissonance, and the struggle between competing social classes, interests, and world views. The activities of state institutions are attempts, marked by conflict and struggle, to secure hegemony and win consensus. Public education, a primary institution in this process, is thus complex and contradictory, reflecting not only bourgeois ideology and interests but the ideologies and interests from subordinate classes as well (see also Shapiro, 1990).

While Poulantzas's work is helpful in constituting state education as a 'site of struggle' rather than a determined apparatus, other theoretical ventures further our understanding of the contradictory goals of state apparatuses and the subsequent problems associated with policy formation.

For instance, Carnoy and Levine (1985) and Shapiro (1990) argue that as 'sites of struggle' schools confront conflicting political, religious, and social interests, and not unlike the state, face problems sustaining their legitimacy. Thus, set against the state's need to increasingly control the educational realm (to secure the requisites of the production process) there exists a countertendency aimed at reducing state power (to secure public support for its increasingly interventionist role in the economy).

These dual imperatives are reflected in current educational policies. For example, the attack on the remnants of progressive education vocalized in current task force reports reflect the state's agenda to fulfill production and accumulation requirements of advanced capitalist society. However, as proposed programs are enacted to reshape the organization of education around the principles of industrial efficiency, control, and administration, state legitimacy is threatened as the educational agendas of other public groups are neglected. In response, additional state policies are advocated which attempt to regain legitimacy. These policies often support popular democratic ideologies by decreasing state control over education in certain areas. We see this in proposed legislation which, via educational vouchers and tuition tax credits, supports the notion of public choice in education, even if that choice is to seek education

outside of the state-sponsored system. However, even as state policy attempts to balance its conflicting imperatives, legitimation problems, especially in the arena of education, continue to emerge.

The theoretical works of Gramsci (1971) and Poulantzas (1978, 1979) provide insight into the continual struggles being waged on the landscape of public education. In order to secure its legitimacy, they reason, the state must enact educational policies and support schooling processes that encompass more than the mere imposition of the dominant ideology. The values, meanings, and practices transmitted through the educational process must come from the entire field of human experience; that is, from all economic classes and social groupings. The implication is that the legitimation of public education can be won only when schooling processes represent the cultural tendencies of a plurality of social factions so that all groups will experience the educational process as legitimate. When the task of formulating and enacting policies and programs that embody this range of cultural meanings is not successful, the structure of public education is experienced as flawed by certain social groups (see also Shapiro, 1984).

In addition to the problem of developing educational processes that represent the cultural experiences of many social groups, the state also confronts the uneven development of agencies of socialization (see Shapiro, 1984; Bell, 1976). In advanced capitalist societies, these agencies (e.g., church, schools, and family) are not alway congruent and harmonious; in fact, they exhibit different modes of development and often transmit contradictory ideologies.

This notion of diverse ideological apparatuses (or institutions of socialization) marked by uneven modes of development is also relevant for the understanding the legitimacy crisis of education. If, in addition to the dominant culture, there exist fragmentary, localized subcultures, then various ideological apparatuses may well express conflicting ideological messages. That is, the meanings, values, and norms embodied in school may well be in contradiction to other ideological apparatuses, most importantly, the church and the family, that articulate a different set of messages. The legitimacy of public education becomes threatened when family and religious ideologies conflict with those perpetuated in public schools.

Structural Contradictions and Educational Delegitimation: The Case of Home Education

The above discussion delineates the primary sources of the legitimation crisis in education. The manner in which this crisis manifests itself is reflected in the emergence of social movements and political activities organized around particularistic issues. Such activities and movements, conservative or egalitarian in nature, are often underpinned by local and/or individual challenges to the increasing consolidation of state power over education and an attempt to defend a 'way of life' perceived as threatened by state activities and policies.

Understanding the state and public education as arenas which attempt to legitimate themselves by embodying the ideologies of many different public segments and other agencies of socialization as arenas which embody ideologies in contradiction to those transmitted by state

institutions, the context surrounding parental choice to home educate gains clearer focus. The life-style concerns of certain groups within the general public are not met as the state seeks to secure its hegemony through educational processes by balancing the dual imperatives of accumulation and legitimation, and family and religious institutions embody contradictory notions of the "proper" socialization children should receive. The decision to home school (or seek other forms of privatized education) thus represents a political response by people who are attempting to defend their 'way of life' which they perceived is threatened by the current organization and content of public education. The study of home education underscores the importance of these theoretical issues.

The Study

My examination of home school parents in Oregon provided a wealth of survey and in-depth interview data regarding the motivations and rationales parents had for teaching their children at home. The study utilized a two-stage research design to generate detailed information about home school parents. A questionnaire with 154 variables was mailed to 1,600 families throughout the state of Oregon. Approximately half of the questions were open-ended and yielded an abundance of qualitative data. Respondents were asked to describe the various factors that contributed to their decision to home school and to discuss why home education was their favored choice, rather than enrolling their children in either private or church-related schools. Moreover, parents were questioned about their political and religious beliefs and affiliations as well as their commitments to mainstream social institutions.

Home school families who received the survey were ientified from a wide variety of sources including school district lists, home school associations and suport groups, and the subscription lists of several prominent home school publications. The variety of distribution techniques used allowed me to obtain approximately a 35% response rate. After examining the data, I was encouraged to discover that the respondents' orientations to home schooling were similar to those identified by other home school researchers (e.g., Wartes, 1987; Van Galen, 1986; Pitman, 1987).

In-depth interviews were also conducted to further explore parents' motivations to home school and the nature of their disagreements with public education. The categories that had been generated from the analysis of the survey provided clues about the context within which the decision to home school had been made and aided in the construction of an interview schedule. Dimensional ssampling (Arnold, 1970) was used to select 15 families that represented the significant dimensions along which the families who had participated in the survey varied. The parent participants were asked to explore the relationship between their biographical sketches, the social, religious, and political context of their lives, and their decision to home school. The line of questioning used provided me with "touchstones" (Becker, 1970) from which a description of the various life-style concerns of home school parents emerged. Moreover, the interviews were designed to demonstrate how the belief and value systems of home educators may either conflict or be in congruence with those transmitted through public education. The interview data was analyzed according to the "constant comparative" (Glaser and Strauss

1987) method which allowed the similarities and differences in parents' motivations and belief systems to be uncovered. The results of the study suggested that inter-institutional linkages between families' decision to privatize their children's education and the legitimation problems confronted by the state do indeed exist.

Results

Home school parents' (and most likely, parents who send their children to private school) resistence to public education goes deeper than the explanations of educational "crisis" commonly found in the contemporary literature. Although drugs and alcohol on campus, crime, disciplinary policies, and academic and moral standards are certainly important problems facing public schools--problems that have generated a great deal of parental anxiety (Phi Delta Kappan, 1989)--the skepticism home school parents have about public education reflects a wider set of social concerns that are rooted in the increased bureaucratizing and rationalization of public schools as well as other state-sponsored institutions; organizational processes that are the consequence of the state's attempt to balance its dual functions which ultimately undermines traditional forms of legitimation, that once went unquestioned, by diminishing individual control in areas of live previously assigned to the private sphere (see Habermas, 1973). Public schools and other social institutions that have become highly rationalized no longer have validity in the eyes of home school parents. A number of dimensions from the Oregon study supported this contention.

The Deligitimation of Social Institutions

The majority home school parents in the study lacked confidence in public schools (see Table 1). Their lack of confidence was greater than that of the general population and appeared to be related to the minimul influence they felt they had in making educational decisions which affected their children. For instance, when questioned about the current degree of governmental influence in public education many parents stated that they did not think "government had anyplace in home, church, or school," and believed the government should "let parents decide what their children should learn." These home school parents desired a reduction in the influence of federal and state government in education and supported increasing the influence of local government. Although local government influence in public education received the most support, a significant number of parents also desired less local government influence over education. A number of written comments on the survey helped explain this finding. Parents preferring less influence by local government often wrote that their first choice would be for parents to control schools and believed "the government should get out [of public education] entirely." It may be that those parents who desired more local influence may have preferred, if given the choice, "more parental influence." As one mother stated, "at this moment, if I had to give up home schooling, I would feel some sense of abandonment of my kid. I would be turning over their mind and their spirit and their soul to a state institution."

TABLE 1

CONFIDENCE IN STATE-CONTROLLED EDUCATION

	Oregon Home School Parents (%)	Norc Survey[1] (%)
AMOUNT OF CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION		
a great deal	2	35
only some	41	56
hardly any	57	9
	(N=404)	(N=1441)
GOVERNMENT INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION		Gallup Survey[2]
Federal Government		
wants more influence	5	37
wants less influence	84	38
wants same influence	11	14
don't know	0	10
State Government		
wants more influence	8	55
wants less influence	76	21
wants same influence	16	15
don't know	0	9
Local Government		
wants more influence	49	62
wants less influence	36	15
wants same influence	14	15
don't know	0	8
	(N=375)	(N=1571)

1. SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center, General Social Surveys, 1982-1987. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987.
2. SOURCE: Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, Phi Delta Kappan, September 1987, pp. 44-59.

The lack of confidence home school parents have in other state-related institutions is illustrated in Table 2. They lack confidence not only in public education, but labor, the press, the executive branch, and the military. Once again, their degree of confidence is markedly less than expressed in the national population. It is

interesting to note that the executive branch is also suspect among this group. More confidence in these institutions was expected since most home school parents maintain politically conservative viewpoints. The majority (82%), however, had "hardly any" or "only some" confidence in the executive branch, and only 18 percent had "a great deal" of confidence. This was surprising considering that these figures closely approximate those found in the more liberally-oriented general population.

A similar pattern was found in the confidence home school parents had in the military. Once again, their conservative political affiliations and viewpoints would suggest that the military would be an institution that received support. Only 12 percent, however, had "a great deal" of confidence in the military, while 88 percent had "only some" or "hardly any" confidence in this institution. In contrast, the more liberal national population had greater confidence in the military than did home school parents. Given the political conservatism of home school parents, greater, rather than less, conficence than what was demonstrated in the national sample was expected.

TABLE 2

CONFIDENCE IN OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

	Oregon Home School Parents (%)	Norc Survey[1] (%)
Organized Labor		
a great deal	3	11
only some	36	54
hardly any	57	9
	(N=398)	(N=1383)
Press		
a great deal	3	19
only some	35	57
hardly any	62	24
	(N=397)	(N=1433)
Executive Branch		
a great deal	18	19
only some	59	54
hardly any	23	27
	(N=397)	(N=1416)
Military		
a great deal	12	35
only some	63	52
hardly any	25	13
	(N=399)	(N=1415)

1. SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center. General Social Surveys, 1982-1987: Cumulative Codebook. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987.

Table 3 reveals another surprising finding. Organized religion was also held in low esteem by this group. Only 15 percent of the home school sample had "a great deal" of confidence in organized religion, while 29 percent had "hardly any" confidence at all. Both figures reflected less confidence in organized religion than found in the general population. This finding appears contradictory given the religiousity of many home school parents. Most likely, organized religion was identified with mainstream bureaucratized religions such

as Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran. If this is the case, the lack of confidence in organized religion is consistent with the religious mobility of home school parents from estabilished traditional religions into peripheral and nondenominational organizations (see Table 4) and with their lack of confidence in other mainstream institutions.

TABLE 3

RELIGIOUS CONFIDENCE AND MOBILITY

	Oregon Home School Parents (%)	Norc Survey[1] (%)
Confidence in Organized Religion		
a great deal	15	30
only some	56	51
hardly any	29	19
	(N=400)	(N=1416)
Religious Mobility of Protestant Home School Parents	Religious Tradition Raise In (N=220)	Religious Tradition Now Belonging (N=288)
Traditional (core)		
Methodist/Lutheran/ Episcopalian/Baptist/ Presbyterian	63	25
Non-Traditional (periphery)		
Nazarene/Four Square/ Christian Reform/ Church of God/ Evangelical/ Born Again Christian/ Pentecostal	30	49
Non-Denominational Christian	7	27
New Age/Pantheist/Sufi/ Hindu/Buddhist/Baha'i/ Urantia Book	0	2

1. SOURCE: National Opinion Research Center, General Social Surveys, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Ideological Conflicts and Delegitmation

I have suggested that the context surrounding privatized education encompasses not only resistance to large-scale social institutions that are characterized by bureaucratic and rational forms of organization, but also the ideological messages which become embodied in those institutions. Specifically, I have argued that public education, in order to secure its legitimacy, must transmit values and meanings that represent a plurality of ideological orientations. This becomes problematic in state-sponsored institutions, like education, that continually struggle to balance their dual imperatives of capitalist reproduction and legitimation. It becomes highly likely, therefore, that certain segments of the population will have ideological orientations that are not congruent with the values and meanings transmitted in public schools. Privatized education becomes a viable option for those whose ideological orientations are not supported. Again, the study of home education highlights this point.

Two groups of parents home school primarily for ideological reasons--religious and New Age (Mayberry, 1988). Home schooling makes sense to both groups because it provides them the means to reproduce their 'way of life' by controlling the content of their children's education. Both groups are ideologically committed to home schooling, yet each have fundamentally different world views.

The largest group of home school parents in this study were those motivated by Christian religious beliefs (see Mayberry, 1988). This group's home school activity must be understood within the context of their religious philosophy, the secular orientation of public schools, and wider social issues. These families were concerned primarily with

what they perceived was a family right, rather than a state right, to take charge of the education of their children. Religiously-oriented home school parents specifically opposed the secular orientation of public education and clearly stated their dislike of secular humanism, values clarification, the teaching of evolution, sex education, and the anti-religious atmosphere of public schools. Many criticized public schools for having no moral standards--public school standards, they argued, are not part of Christian morality. Some cited the "lack of absolutes" in public schooling, while others were frustrated by "how many things aren't being taught, or will be altered...because we're a post-Christian society," which ignors that "Christianity is what's given us all our values all our lives." These parents viewed home schooling as a means to protect their children from secular ideologies and as a means to insure that their children were raised with a belief in the authority of the scriptures.

For religious familes, home schooling solved many problems; it was one arena where their beliefs and values could be protected and passed on. Home schooling was seen as a means of reinforcing religious values, turning back the tide of moral decay, reviving the authority of God, and protecting their children from the humanistic ideology of public schools. Consider the following comments:

> If you look in your high school textbooks, you'll see that evolution is caused by micromutations over millions of years. That's an absolute bold-faced lie--a disproved scientific supposition. Where's the proof, where's the truth? Since there is no God we came from nothing...that develops into communism; for communists, evolution is the scientific underpinnings for communism.

> I still like ideas to be able to be expressed freely. That's why we don't like the public school system, we don't feel that there is the freedom. What it's free from is Christianity, that's what it's free from.

> They have taken the Christ out of Christmas and now it's winter break; they have taken the resurrection out of Easter and now it's Spring break; but they are determined to leave witches and Satan in Halloween.

Another group of parents oriented toward home schooling for ideological reasons were adherents of New Age philosophy. Home schooling made sense to New Age families because it provided them the opportunity to give their children an educational experience which reflected the philosphy of the New Age (see Furgeson, 1986). Like parents motivated by religious concerns, they saw home schooling as the vehicle which reinforced 'a way of life' and system of beliefs. Their beliefs, however, were based upon the supremacy of humanity; the ultimate source of authority, they contended, was not with God but within each individual. New Age thought appealed to these parents because it rejects "rationalism" and celebrates personal and experiential dimensions. These cornerstones of New Age thought provided the foundation upon which New Age adherents rejected mainstream social institutions.

New Age parents who taught their children at home oppossed public schools because experiential and holistic values were not being nurtured. Home schooling, they contended, "allows us and our children to actualize our full potentials...to address social consciusness, quality of life for everyone, ecological concerns, the seeming decline of the individual, and personally-motivated values and ethics..." Moreover, New Age families claimed control of their children's education to restore family unity and lay the foundations necessary for the ascent into the New Age. As one parent explained:

> We believe that the main task of education for the New Age is to assist a child in developing the attitude needed for the bridge between the personality and the soul; we believe that parents who are bonded to and the primary custodian of the child are the best people to understand the individual needs of the beings in their care; the parents are the optimal co-creators of the life experience.

New Age home school parents are similar to religious home school parents in their ideological resistance of public education. Both groups perceived home schooling as an activity that provided them a way to reproduce their 'way of life' by controlling the content of their children's education. Thus, the meanings and values embodied in public education were not the ones that these parents wanted articulated to their children. State-sponsored schooling was resisted and delegitimated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper began by arguing that the privitization of education must be understood within the wider context of the legitimation crisis of the state. It was suggested that this crisis is rooted in the state's inability to balance its dual imperatives of accumulation and legitmation as well as its embodiment of ideologies that are in contradiction with those transmitted in other agencies of socialization, especially the family.

In an increasingly diversified society where state institutions confront an ever-growing set of demands that must be met if institutional legitimacy is to be maintained, public education emerges as a primary arena where the conflicts and struggles over whose demands are to be represented are voiced. It is precisely in the attempts made by the state to "restructure" educational institutions in a manner that fulfills this wide diversity of demands that delegitimation and

resistence occur. As Habermas (1973) has argued, the state attempts to reorganize (and thus legitimate) its institutions by increasing administrative planning and the rationalization of institutional processes. These attempts (reflected in education with curriculum planning, accountability programs, etc.), however, exacerbate the problem by undermining the traditional forms of legitimacy upon which public institutions have historically relied:

> Rationalization [i.e., administrative planning] destroys the unquestionable character of validity claims that were previously taken for granted; it stirs up matters that were previously settled by the cultural tradition in an unproblematic way; and thus it furthers the politicization of areas of life previously assigned to the private sphere (cf. McCarthy, 1978: 369-370).

The increasing number of parents "exiting" public school institutions to teach their children at home supports Habermas' claims. As the discussion of home schooling has indicated, the rationales parents had for circumventing public education revolved around their lack of influence in setting the public school agenda as well as their opposition to the ideological content of public school programs. Moreover, the study demonstrated that home school parents had little confidence in other mainstream social institutions. A similar feature of such institutions is the degree to which they are increasingly organized around the principles of rationality and efficiency. Such institutions are perceived by groups such as home school parents to be oppositional to the cultural and value orientations that construct their 'way of life.'

It has been argued that the current trend toward privatized education must be examined within the wider context of 'state crises' which manifests itself at the organizational and ideological levels of

the state. That is, the movement toward privatized education is socially determined. It is linked to the state's struggle to balance contradictory imperatives which ultimately have a profound impact on families by shaping the educational decisions they make for they children.

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